

# Wisconsin ServicePoint

## **Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)**

Wisconsin ServicePoint (WISP) is a web-based HMIS implemented in May 2001 by the Wisconsin Bureau of Housing (BOH). WISP was implemented to better understand the scope of homelessness in Wisconsin, to improve service delivery to homeless persons, and to evaluate the effectiveness of service interventions. In addition to collecting basic demographic information about persons experiencing homelessness, WISP is also being used to identify:

- Reasons for homelessness
- Chronic homelessness
- Barriers to housing stability
- Outcomes of services provided
- Service needs and services provided
- Obstacles to self-sufficiency

Wisconsin ServicePoint is currently used throughout Wisconsin by over 125 agencies that provide homeless assistance services. Participation is expected to expand to 175 Partner Agencies by 2005.

## **What Are the Benefits of Using Wisconsin ServicePoint?**

### **For the Service Provider:**

- Provides online real-time information about needs and available services for homeless persons;
- Assures confidentiality by providing information in a secured system;
- Decreases duplicative client intakes and assessments;
- Tracks client outcomes and provides a client history;
- Generates data reports for local use and to meet state and federal reporting requirements;
- Helps agencies evaluate their effectiveness, identify service gaps and make sound decisions on where to focus staff and financial resources;
- Facilitates the coordination of services internally and externally with other agencies and programs;
- Provides access to a statewide database of service providers and allows agency staff to easily select a referral agency.

### **For Persons Who Are Homeless**

- Intake information and needs assessments are maintained historically so the number of times homeless persons must repeat their stories to multiple service providers is reduced.
- The opportunity to provide intake and life history one time demonstrates that service providers consider the homeless person's time is valuable and restores some of the consumer's dignity.
- Multiple services can be easily coordinated and referrals streamlined; and
- Increased life value and self-esteem for homeless persons when their information is entered into the database because are more than just a number or statistic.

### **For the State of Wisconsin**

- Better able to define and understand the extent of homelessness throughout Wisconsin;
- Better able to focus staff and financial resources to those geographical areas, agencies and programs where services for homeless persons is needed the most;
- Better able to evaluate the effectiveness of specific interventions and specific programs and services provided.
- Better able to provide the State Legislature and the federal government with data and information on the homeless population in Wisconsin; and
- Better able to meet all federal reporting requirements.

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## **Why Wisconsin ServicePoint?**

A review of Wisconsin's data collection efforts revealed that the data collected about Wisconsin's homeless persons was woefully inadequate. It was based primarily on point-in-time monthly census reports from 36 shelter programs and the quarterly reports submitted by HUD Emergency Shelter Grant (ESG) funded agencies. Data was collected from less than half of the shelter programs in the state. Both the BOH and local agencies needed more accurate quantifiable data on the homeless population in Wisconsin. With sound, empirical data BOH and local agencies could better target funds and document the need for additional funds.

Beginning in the mid-1990's, Congress focused support on a Continuum of Care (COC) strategy that assisted communities to plan for and provide a full range of housing opportunities and associated support services to homeless persons. As part of the COC strategy the Supportive Housing Program (SHP), designed to promote the development of housing linked with supportive services, was authorized under the McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987. Wisconsin receives approximately \$20 Million in SHP funds annually.

In October 2000 Congress acknowledged *"the need for data and analysis on the extent of homelessness and the effectiveness of the McKinney Act programs."* Congressional conferees concurred with the importance of developing unduplicated counts of homeless persons at the local level. They further stated that *"local jurisdictions should analyze the use of assistance, including how people enter/exit the homeless assistance system and evaluate the effectiveness of the systems. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) should take whatever steps are possible to draw inferences from this data about the extent and nature of homelessness nationally. HUD is directed to take the lead in working with communities toward this end, and to analyze jurisdictional data within three years."*

**HUD has established a goal that every Continuum of Care (COC) jurisdiction should collect unduplicated, client-level data by September, 2004.** Unduplicated, client-level data includes demographic, needs, services and housing information for all homeless persons, not just those in HUD-funded programs. HMIS participation is now either a requirement, or is expected to be a requirement, of HUD grant programs for homeless persons.

## **Becoming a Wisconsin ServicePoint Partner Agency**

It is not difficult or expensive to become a WISP Partner agency. Any agency providing homeless assistance is eligible to participate. No special software is required. Since WISP is a web-based software product, only access to the Internet is needed to begin implementation. BOH has stipends available to assist agencies in purchasing hardware and Internet connections for WISP.

Participation in WISP is very cost effective since BOH charges a one-time participation fee that ranges from \$110 to \$350 per WISP user, depending upon the number of users in each agency. The annual support fee is equal to 20-25% of the participation fee. Hands-on training classes are held periodically at different locations around the state at no charge.

For more information or questions about Wisconsin ServicePoint contact **SPHELP@COMMERCE.STATE.WI.US**.